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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

August 30, 2005

To: School Administrators, Clerks, Transportation Directors, and School Bus Contractors

From: Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

Re: "S" Endorsement for School Bus Drivers

In a press release issued August 25, 2005, Attorney General Mike McGrath announced recent changes to federal regulations which mandate the "S" endorsement for school bus drivers in Montana. These changes extend the deadline for mandatory tests an additional year to September 30, 2006. McGrath's announcement has generated many questions from school districts regarding the impact of the extended deadline on Montana school bus drivers.

I would like to provide additional information to help answer questions that the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has received from school district personnel and individual school bus drivers. Federal motor carrier safety regulations require school bus drivers to take a driving test (skills test) and a written test. The original deadline for these mandatory tests was September 30, 2005. Drivers with at least two years of school bus driving experience immediately prior to the deadline could waive the skills test requirement. The Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) of the Department of Justice is responsible for administering both tests.

In the press release MVD Administrator Dean Roberts said his staff has been scrambling to meet the deadline by testing drivers in group settings around the state. To date, this effort has been very effective and over half of Montana's 3,600 drivers have taken the written portion of the test.

Drivers who do not yet qualify for the waiver, but will complete two years of school bus driving experience prior to the new September 30, 2006 deadline will benefit from the extension. Mr. Roberts is encouraging both drivers who qualify for the waiver now and those who will qualify by next year to complete the written test prior to the original September 30, 2005 deadline.

Drivers can continue to drive with a current CDL, medical and first aid card through September 30, 2006. It is important to encourage drivers to complete the "S" endorsement requirement as soon as possible so they are not up against the deadline next year.

School bus drivers with questions about their status, or about dates and times of written and skills tests should contact the Motor Vehicle Division at (406) 444-3292.

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